



My Beloved Ones,

For us as Orthodox Christians, the act of fasting is a practice rich with meaning, as we follow our Lord's example during His forty days in the desert. However, the true Orthodox Christian understands that it is not enough to practice fasting alone. The Church invites us to participate fully in its liturgical life during Fasts by also feeding our prayer life, and by giving charitably to those in need.

For this reason, during the forty-day period before Christmas—which began this Thursday, November 15th—there is a Tradition from the ancient Church of celebrating a Divine Liturgy every morning. Of course, today, where communities may only have one priest, this is a rare thing; but our Metropolis is blessed to be able to have many clergymen—including the Chancellor, the Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis, the Dean and Priest of the Annunciation Cathedral, Fr. Paul Kaplanis and Fr. Christos Mars—who will be able to help us fulfill this important spiritual practice. When His Grace Bishop Sevastianos arrives on December 1st, He and I will also be blessed to liturgize during some of the

Holy Feasts that fall during the Nativity Fast.

Daily liturgies however, require the presence of the faithful—whether they are with us physically, or only spiritually. We ask therefore, that you please contact Mrs. Ethel Gjerde, the Metropolis Executive Assistant (404-634-9345) submitting to her the names of your loved ones—whether they are in need, or if they have fallen asleep in the Lord—so that we can pray for them daily.

One of the Church Fathers, Ignatios Theoforos (“He Who Bears God on His Shoulders”) instructs us concerning the Divine Liturgy, that, *“Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when you assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith. Nothing is more precious than peace, by which all war, both in heaven and earth, is brought to an end.”* Having received this peace of mind and soul, we are better able to consider those acts such as fasting, prayer and charity.

We should not assume the power that comes from the Liturgy to be any kind of “magic.” We offer the bread and wine as gifts to our God, who, by the Grace of His Holy Spirit, allows them to become the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior. The power of this Sacred Mystery is really the power of Love: connection with both our God, and with our fellow men—both the living, and those who have fallen asleep (whom we commemorate as we prepare the Gifts). Within the Liturgy, we are taught by our Lord to reflect upon our own weaknesses, and to then forgive our brothers and sisters for trespasses committed against us. We then depart, spiritually strengthened, able to carry out the loving mission of the Gospel.

During this Nativity Fast, let us pray for one another, let us help those who are in need—spiritually or physically; and let us forgive one another. May we be blessed to take advantage of these Liturgies: to purify our hearts, to ask for Strength from Above, as well as for good thoughts and good actions. In this way, we may be prepared to receive our Savior, who condescended to take on Flesh for the Salvation of our souls. God be with us all.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta